AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1. (Currently Amended) A method for searching a content database stored in computer storage, the <u>content</u> database including a plurality of records each containing multiple ~~fields of information~~ <u>field types within a set of field types</u>, the method comprising the steps of:

maintaining a structure database in computer storage in which ~~each record is parsed~~ <u>the set of field types are organized</u> into a plurality of categories <u>and zero or more sub-categories</u> ~~containing multiple fields of information~~, each category having ~~at least one sub-category~~ <u>zero or more sub-categories</u>, ~~the sub-categories being structured in at least one sub-level based upon a relationship between the information in sub-categories,~~ the structure database containing ~~category structure information defining the data structure of each category,~~ <u>for each record, record relationship information indicating categories and sub-categories of the multiple field types of the record and category and sub-category relationships of the multiple field types of the record;</u>

receiving a search query ~~containing a subset of the categories contained in a record, which subset may include all of the categories, the query containing selection information indicating those sub-categories that should be present in records being sought by the query~~ <u>comprising a selection of multiple field types within the set of field types;</u>

<u>determining query relationship information indicating categories and sub-categories of the multiple field types of the search query and category and sub-category relationships of the multiple field types of the search query;</u>

~~for categories present in the query subset,~~ performing a correlation between the ~~selection~~ <u>query relationship</u> information and <u>the record relationship</u> information ~~from the structure database representing the sub-category structure in a subset of the records, which subset may contain all of the records,~~ <u>for one or more records</u> to produce a relevance value for ~~a record~~ <u>each of the one or more records;</u> and

as a response to the query, selecting information from records in the content database based upon the relevance ~~value of the records~~ <u>values for the one or more records.</u>

2. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1 wherein the correlation step is performed <u>for a record</u> by ~~correlating selection information for a chosen category with information from the structure database representing the sub-category structure of the same category in a subset of the records, which subset may contain all of the records, to produce a relevance value for the chosen category in each record of the subset, this correlating step being performed for a plurality of chosen categories; and, for a record, combining the relevance values of the plurality of chosen categories to produce a relevance value for the record~~ <u>correlating each of two or more categories in the search query with a corresponding category in the record to produce a relevance value for the category, and determining the relevance value of the record based on the relevance values determined for the two or more categories in the search query</u>.

3. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the correlating step is different for two categories that have different data structures.

4. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1 wherein performing a correlation includes assigning a weight to a sub-category in a record depending on whether that sub-category is present in the ~~selection information~~ <u>search query</u>, and using the assigned weight in the correlating step.

5. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1 wherein<u>:</u>

<u>the sub-categories of a category are structured in at least one sub-level based upon a relationship between the field types in the sub-categories; and</u>

performing a correlation includes assigning a weight to a sub-category in a record depending upon its level, and using the assigned weight in the correlating step.

6. (Currently Amended) A system for searching a content database stored in computer storage, the <u>content</u> database including a plurality of records each containing multiple ~~fields of information~~ <u>field types within a set of field types</u>, the ~~method~~ <u>system</u> comprising:

a structure database in computer storage in which ~~each record is parsed~~ the set of field types are organized into a plurality of categories and zero or more sub-categories ~~containing multiple fields of information~~, each category having ~~at least one sub-category~~ zero or more sub-categories, ~~the sub-categories being structured in at least one sub-level based upon a relationship between the information in sub-categories,~~ the structure database containing ~~category structure information defining the data structure of each category,~~ for each record, record relationship information indicating categories and sub-categories of the multiple field types of the record and category and sub-category relationships of the multiple field types of the record;

a receiver for receiving a search query ~~containing a subset of the categories contained in a record, which subset may include all of the categories, the query containing selection information indicating those sub-categories that should be present in records being sought by the query~~ comprising a selection of multiple field types within the set of field types;

a determining device for determining query relationship information indicating categories and sub-categories of the multiple field types of the search query and category and sub-category relationships of the multiple field types of the search query;

a correlation device ~~set~~ for performing a correlation between the ~~selection~~ query relationship information~~, for categories present in the query subset,~~ and the record relationship information ~~from the structure database representing the sub-category structure in a subset of the records, which subset may contain all of the records,~~ for one or more records to produce a relevance value for ~~a record~~ each of the one or more records; and

a response unit for responding to the query by selecting and providing information from records in the content database based upon the relevance ~~value of the records~~ values for the one or more records.

7. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 6 wherein the correlation device ~~correlates selection information for a chosen category with information from the structure database representing the sub-category structure of the same category in a subset of the records, which subset may contain all of the records, to produce a relevance value for~~

~~a chosen category in each record of the subset, this correlation being performed for a plurality of chosen categories; and, a correlation device including a component combining the relevance values of the plurality of chosen categories to produce a relevance value for the record~~ performs a correlation for a record by correlating each of two or more categories in the search query with a corresponding category in the record to produce a relevance value for the category, and determining the relevance value of the record based on the relevance values determined for the two or more categories in the search query.

8. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 6 wherein the correlation device performs a different operation for two categories that have different data structures.

9. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 6 wherein the correlation device includes a component which assigns a weight to a sub-category in a record depending on whether that sub-category is present in the ~~selection information~~ search query, and the correlation ~~unit~~ device uses the assigned weight in performing the correlation.

10. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 6 wherein:
the sub-categories of a category are structured in at least one sub-level based upon a relationship between the field types in the sub-categories; and
the correlation ~~unit~~ device includes a component which assigns a weight to a sub-category in a record depending upon its level, and the correlation ~~unit~~ device uses the assigned weight in performing the correlation.

11. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 6 provided with access to a network, the content database being accessible from the network, the receiver and ~~responding~~ response unit communicating over the network.

12. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 11 wherein the content database is accessed through the network.

13. (Currently Amended) In an online user forum of the type permitting communication among a plurality of users and also permitting users to post information content for access by users, the improvement comprising a reputation module storing a reputation rating for a user in association with information content, a user's reputation being a function of the degree of his participation in the forum, said reputation module being included within a system for searching a content database stored in computer storage, the <u>content</u> database including a plurality of records each containing multiple ~~fields of information~~ <u>field types within a set of field types</u>, the system further comprising:

a structure database in computer storage in which ~~each record is parsed~~ <u>the set of field types are organized</u> into a plurality of categories <u>and zero or more sub-categories</u> ~~containing multiple fields of information~~, each category having ~~at least one sub-category~~ <u>zero or more sub-categories</u>, ~~the sub-categories being structured in at least one sub-level based upon a relationship between the information in sub-categories,~~ the structure database containing ~~category structure information defining the data structure of each category,~~ <u>for each record, record relationship information indicating categories and sub-categories of the multiple field types of the record and category and sub-category relationships of the multiple field types of the record;</u>

a receiver for <u>receiving</u> a search query ~~containing a subset of the categories contained in a record, which subset may include all of the categories, the query containing selection information indicating those sub-categories that should be present in records being sought by the query~~ <u>comprising a selection of multiple field types within the set of field types;</u>

<u>a determining device for determining query relationship information indicating categories and sub-categories of the multiple field types of the search query and category and sub-category relationships of the multiple field types of the search query;</u>

a correlation device ~~set~~ <u>for</u> performing a correlation between the ~~selection~~ <u>query relationship</u> information~~, for categories present in the query subset,~~ and <u>the record relationship</u> information ~~from the structure database representing the sub-category structure~~

~~in a subset of the records, which subset may contain all of the records,~~ for one or more records to produce a relevance value for ~~a record~~ each of the one or more records; and

a response unit for responding to the query by selecting and providing information from records in the content database based upon the relevance ~~value of the records~~ values for the one or more records.

14. (Previously Presented) The forum of claim 13 wherein the reputation module is constructed so that a first user's reputation rating is dependent upon the evaluation by other users of the information posted by the first user.

15. (Previously Presented) The forum of claim 13 wherein the reputation module is constructed so that a first user's reputation rating is dependent upon his evaluation of information posted by other users.

16. (Previously Presented) The forum of claim 13 wherein the reputation module is constructed so that a first user's reputation rating is dependent more on the evaluation by other users of the information posted by the first user than upon the first user's evaluation of information posted by other users.

17. (Cancelled)

18. (Currently Amended) The forum of claim 13 wherein the correlation device ~~correlates selection information for a chosen category with information from the structure database representing the sub-category structure of the same category in a subset of the records, which subset may contain all of the records, to produce a relevance value for a chosen category in each record of the subset, this correlation being performed for a plurality of chosen categories; and, a correlation device including a component combining the relevance values of the plurality of chosen categories to produce a relevance value for the record~~ performs a correlation for a record by correlating each of two or more categories in the search query with a corresponding category in the record to produce a relevance

value for the category, and determining the relevance value of the record based on the relevance values determined for the two or more categories in the search query.

19. (Currently Amended) The forum of claim ~~18~~ 13 wherein the correlation device performs a different operation for two categories that have different data structures.

20. (Currently Amended) The forum of claim ~~19~~ 13 wherein the correlation device includes a component which assigns a weight to a sub-category in a record depending on whether that sub-category is present in the ~~selection information~~ search query, and the correlation ~~unit~~ device uses the assigned weight in performing the correlation.

21. (Currently Amended) The forum of claim ~~20~~ 13 wherein:

the sub-categories of a category are structured in at least one sub-level based upon a relationship between the field types in the sub-categories; and

the correlation ~~unit~~ device includes a component which assigns a weight to a sub-category in a record depending upon its level, and the correlation ~~unit~~ device uses the assigned weight in performing the correlation.

22. (Currently Amended) The forum of claim 13 provided with access to a network, the content database being accessible from the network, the receiver and ~~responding~~ response unit communicating over the network.

23. (Previously Presented) The forum of claim 22 wherein the content database is accessed through the network.

24 – 58. (Canceled)

59. (New) The method of claim 1, wherein the relevance value for a record indicates a degree of similarity between the categories and sub-categories of the search query and the categories and sub-categories of the record.

60. (New) The method of claim 1, wherein:

a maximum relevance value for a record indicates that all categories and sub-categories of the search query are found in the categories and sub-categories of the record; and

a sub-maximum relevance value for a record indicates that some but not all categories and sub-categories of the search query are found in the categories and sub-categories of the record.

61. (New) The method of claim 1, wherein a relevance value for at least one record indicates that some but not all categories and sub-categories of the search query are found in the categories and sub-categories of the record.

62. (New) The system of claim 6, wherein the relevance value for a record indicates a degree of similarity between the categories and sub-categories of the search query and the categories and sub-categories of the record.

63. (New) The system of claim 6, wherein:

a maximum relevance value for a record indicates that all categories and sub-categories of the search query are found in the categories and sub-categories of the record; and

a sub-maximum relevance value for a record indicates that some but not all categories and sub-categories of the search query are found in the categories and sub-categories of the record.

64. (New) The system of claim 6, wherein a relevance value for at least one record indicates that some but not all categories and sub-categories of the search query are found in the categories and sub-categories of the record.

65. (New) The forum of claim 13, wherein the relevance value for a record indicates a degree of similarity between the categories and sub-categories of the search query and the categories and sub-categories of the record.

66. (New) The forum of claim 13, wherein:

a maximum relevance value for a record indicates that all categories and sub-categories of the search query are found in the categories and sub-categories of the record; and

a sub-maximum relevance value for a record indicates that some but not all categories and sub-categories of the search query are found in the categories and sub-categories of the record.

67. (New) The forum of claim 13, wherein a relevance value for at least one record indicates that some but not all categories and sub-categories of the search query are found in the categories and sub-categories of the record.